

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

Bullying is more commonplace than you may imagine and can have devastating effects on children and teenagers. Although you are not with your children at school, you can teach them about bullying, learn to recognize the signs of bullying and help your child cope with a bully (or stop being a bully).

Bullying: What Parents Can Do

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a serious problem that can happen in any school or other environment. Some adults think it is just a phase or just “messaging around,” but bullying can cause serious harm. Bullying can take many forms:

- Verbal (name-calling, teasing)
- Social (rumor spreading, breaking up friendships, leaving people out on purpose)
- Physical
- Cyberbullying (using the Internet, cell phones or other technological devices to harm others)

You may have never talked to your children about bullying, but it is important that you do. Even if you think there is no bullying going on in your child's life, you can never be sure what happens when you're not around. Open your mind to the fact that your child may be getting bullied – or may even be a bully – so that you can do your best to help.

Risk Factors

Children and teens who are bullied often share one or more of these characteristics:

- Do not get along well with others
- Are less popular
- Have few or no friends
- May not conform to gender or other norms
- Have low self-esteem
- Are depressed or anxious

Children who are bullies themselves often share certain characteristics too, though they typically fall into one of two different “types.” The first type of bully tends to have social influence, be overly concerned about his or her popularity and enjoy being in charge of others.

The other type of bully tends to be isolated from peers, depressed or anxious, easily pressured by peers, less involved with school and have low self-esteem. Both types of bullies may also display these risk factors:

- Aggressiveness
- Thinks badly of others
- Impulsiveness
- Quick temper
- Difficulty following rules
- Views violence positively

Is Your Child Being Bullied?

There are signs that can indicate your child is being bullied, but be aware that these signs are not definite – they could point to other issues or problems as well.

- Comes home with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Loses books, electronics, clothing or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches or feeling sick
- Has trouble sleeping or frequent bad dreams
- Has changed eating habits
- Hurts himself or herself
- Is very hungry after school from not eating lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in friends or suddenly has fewer friends
- Is afraid of going to school
- Loses interest in school or begins to perform poorly
- Is sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed after school
- Talks about suicide
- Feels helpless
- Feels not good enough
- Avoids certain places

If you suspect your child is being bullied, you need to talk with your child. Express your concern and explain that you want to help. Let your child know that bullying is wrong and is not his or her fault. With your child's help, keep a record of all bullying incidents. Suggest ways for your child to respond to the bully and practice various responses. Stay attentive, even if your child claims it has gotten better. Do not tell your child to ignore the bullying or blame your child. Also never encourage your child to harm the bully. Be patient and understanding of the situation.

Do not contact the parents of the bully. Instead, report the bullying to the school and stay in regular communication to ensure the problem is being addressed. Have your child speak with the guidance counselor as well, who may be able to help your child cope and avoid bullying situations in the future.

If you think the bullying is continuing or getting worse after taking these steps, you may need to take additional action. Contact the police if your child is getting harassed or you feel he or she is in physical danger. If you worry that your child is feeling suicidal or having other health issues due to bullying, contact a health professional immediately. And if you feel the school is not doing enough, contact the district superintendent or the State School Department. Though it is the school's responsibility to protect children while at school, you as the parent may need to take further action to ensure that bullying is addressed properly.

Is Your Child a Bully?

The following characteristics may indicate that your child is a bully or has the potential to become a bully:

- Becomes violent with others
- Gets into physical or verbal fights at school
- Is sent to the principal's office or detention frequently
- Has extra money or new belongings that are unexplained
- Is quick to blame others
- Does not accept responsibility for own actions
- Has friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be the best at everything

Bullying is a serious problem that can happen in any school or environment.



If you think your child may be a bully, you need to get involved. Though it can be difficult to learn or even suspect that your child bullies others, it is vital that you take action. Not only will your action help protect the children being bullied, it can also help your own child address problems causing the bullying and reverse negative tendencies. Children who bully are at high risk for escalating their behavior to criminal or other risky activities.

Talk to your child about the accusation and ask for his or her side of the story. Make clear that bullying is serious and will not be tolerated, and explain how bullying is hurtful. You can also help – and more closely watch the situation – by spending more time with your child, knowing who his or her friends are and monitoring free time. Encourage your child to get involved in activities that highlight his or her interests.

Work with the school to ensure the bullying stops and ask the school to keep you informed. Develop a plan with school officials to address the bullying so you can provide a united disciplinary front. Also consider having your child speak with a school counselor or health professional – your child may have underlying health, emotional or other issues that need to be addressed.

How to Prevent Bullying

Many people think bullying is a normal part of childhood, but it is not. Children need to understand that bullying is serious and parents can teach their children important lessons to help them prevent bullying (or avoid becoming a bully themselves). Consider these suggestions:

- Explain what bullying is and that it can take many forms – physical, verbal, over the phone, via the Internet, etc.
- Emphasize that bullying is not normal, funny or acceptable. Help your child understand how hurtful and painful bullying can be for a victim, and encourage your child to speak up if someone else is being bullied.
- Teach your child how to take a stand against bullying, whether the victim is your child or someone else. Encourage your child to talk to you and school officials if bullying occurs. Emphasize that your child should not be afraid to confide in an adult to report bullying.
- Talk to your child regularly about school, friends and other activities. Listen to any concerns he or she has and never be dismissive about a potential bullying situation.
- Encourage your child to pursue interests and talents in after-school activities, clubs or teams.
- Get involved in your child's school. Stay current on events through the school website or newsletter. Get to know other parents, teachers and staff by attending school activities or volunteering your time at events.

Bullying is not a rite of passage and should not be taken lightly. Educating your child about bullying and staying active in his or her life can help prevent bullying, but unfortunately that is not always the case. Pay attention to bullying risk factors and warning signs in your child, and take action if you suspect your child is a bully or is being bullied. If you need additional guidance, speak with a school official or guidance counselor, or visit www.stopbullying.gov/parents/index.html.